

# Biopolitics And Biopower Analyzing The Processes Of Power Over Life

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## Abstract:

*This article aims to explore the dynamics of power over life through the concepts of biopolitics and biopower. In other words, based on the assumption that biopolitics refers to the exercise of power over the lives of individuals and populations, we will analyze biopower as a mechanism by which this power is exercised. In this context, we will examine the origins and evolution of these concepts, as well as their manifestations in the spheres of health, sexuality, economics, control of bodies and social policies. In addition, it will be discussed how these mechanisms of control over bodies affect the lives of the population as well as the form of government.*

**Key Word:** Biopolitics, Biopower, State, Control of Bodies and Social Policies.

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## I. Introduction

This article aims to provide an analysis of the dynamics of power over life through the concepts of biopolitics and biopower. By exploring different areas of application of these concepts, we will seek to understand how power manifests itself in the control and governance of bodies and their impact on the lives of the population.

This paper will initially look at the concepts of biopolitics and biopower, starting with the origins and evolution of these concepts, their philosophical and theoretical influences, including the teachings of the Majestic Michel Foucault.

With this in mind, we will analyze the period of sovereign power, in which the monarch had total power over the lives of the population, in other words, we will look at the period of the renowned "make them die or let them live", and then we will look at how these forms of control over bodies manifest themselves in the most diverse areas of everyday life, for example, we will analyze their implications for health, sexuality, the economy, and finally their repercussions with the advent of capitalism, in other words, how these mechanisms of control over bodies have repercussions on the lives of the population and consequently on the form of governance.

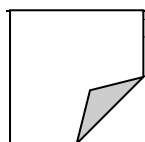
## Ii. Biopolitics And Biopower - Analyzing The Processes Of Power Over Life

Well then, according to Michel Foucault (1926-1984), a French philosopher who, among other great teachings, focused on biopower, which is a way of governing life. It emerged in the West around the 17th century and is divided into two essential axes: discipline, the government of individuals' bodies; and biopolitics, the government of the population as a whole (FOUCAULT, 2012, p. 131).

The biopolitics of population, which acts on the human species, on the body as a species, with the aim of ensuring its existence. Issues such as birth and mortality, standard of living and length of life are linked not only to disciplinary power, but to a type of power that is exercised within the species, the population, with the aim of managing the life of the social body (FOUCAULT, 2015, p. 29).

In other words, according to the above, discipline and biopower come together in the body as a machine in its disciplining. On the other hand, biopolitics, around the 18th century, with the aim of controlling the collective, investigated ways of regulating the population. With this in mind, Foucault characterizes biopolitics and biopower as the need to ensure the continuity of the human species. These new mechanisms, namely biopower and biopolitics, are seen as a way of ensuring the rights to stay alive and are interdependent, as Foucault explains below:

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only to disciplinary power, but to a type of power that is exercised within the species, the population, with the aim of managing the life of the social body (FOUCAULT, 2015, p. 29).

Revel defines it this way:

The term "biopolitics" designates the way in which power tended to transform itself, between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, in order to govern not only individuals through a certain number of disciplinary procedures, but the whole of the living constituted into a population: biopolitics - through local biopowers - would therefore deal with the management of health, hygiene, food, sexuality, birth rates, etc., to the extent that they became political concerns (REVEL, 2005, p. 26).

Thus, in line with Revel's view, as illustrated above, we can see that biopolitics, through biopower, allows the government to manage multiple social policies for the population, such as health, sexuality, etc.

In this context, it is imperative that we discuss sovereign power, which prevailed before the concept of biopolitics and biopower emerged. In fact, in this period, the king had the right of life and death over his subjects. In other words, the king had absolute power to make people die (carried out by his order) and let people live (in other words, the king simply let people live).

In this context, it should also be pointed out that the absolutist state was dominated by the monarchy, in which the people had no say, or rather, in this model, the power of government was hereditary, in other words, passed down from father to son, thus dealing with a form of power for life, in which the king remained in power until he died or left office. However, after the great revolutions, this form of government was abolished. In other words, the state, which was so present during the absolutist period and which determined all the rules of coexistence, including interference between private individuals (the civilian population), had to use other means of controlling the population, as shown below.

Thus, with the decline of sovereign power and absolutist governments, since they no longer retained the power to enforce laws, a new form of government flourished for the benefit of life, based on the support of control mechanisms, which, in turn, reflected in political power, managing people's lives through discipline and biopolitics (FOUCAULT, 2015, p. 28).

Continuing in this vein, in order to better understand biopower, it is of the utmost importance that we go back a little in history and analyze the following: as is well known, today's society has inherited Christian morality, in other words, the denial of our wills in order to achieve a greater good, which in this case is salvation. Well, with this in mind, we live by repressing our desires in order to obtain a place in heaven.

In this scenario, it is imperative to highlight the role that the Catholic Church played in teaching the nobles, a period in which, for Socrates in Plato's *Apology*, the core of being a good citizen was to first take care of oneself and then take care of the population. It is also possible to compare this understanding with the second Biblical commandment, which is to love your neighbor as yourself (7GRAUS, 2009-2023, online). In other words, in both examples, we see, albeit from different perspectives, the need to take care of yourself, because by loving your neighbor as yourself (from the perspective of duty), we will effectively care for the lives of others. In this sense, when we insert this understanding into the context of government, from the moment the ruler takes good care of himself, he is also protecting his health, and he will certainly take greater care of the population.

Thus, returning to the understanding of the fall of sovereign power, it is replaced by continuous surveillance and tax collection as representative forms of power, repression and violence. Autonomy is forbidden in the compulsory standardization of individuals' daily lives that this new form of monitoring proposes and imposes on society. To examine this historical transformation, Foucault (1986) uses the concept of biopower.

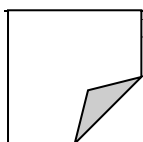
With the advent of capitalism, particularly in the 18th century, productive masses became necessary, in other words, the docilization of individuals became indispensable so that they could carry out services without hindrance. Thus, with the emergence of capitalism, the policy of state control began to discipline individuals in order to nurture productive and docile masses.

In this sense, for Foucault:

This biopower was undoubtedly an indispensable element in the development of capitalism, which could only be guaranteed at the cost of the controlled insertion of bodies into the apparatus of production and by adjusting population phenomena to economic processes (FOUCAULT, 1999b, p. 132).

Thus, based on the teachings of the great Foucault, it can be seen that, in order to guarantee the effectiveness of this change in control over bodies, the state began to structure itself through powers that, little by little, radiated through all levels of the social body, ratified through multiple entities, such as schools, hospitals, the army, prisons, factories, in other words, through various means of administering communities.

From this perspective, in Foucault's great work, *Surveillance and Punishment* (1999c), the philosopher discusses how society is made up of norms based on its institutions and punitive abilities in cases of transgression. In the writing in question, it is possible to see, at the outset, that institutions use coercion and force, then extend in direct or subtle ways to entities, as already mentioned above, (school, church, mental institution, hospital,



prison and others). It is important to emphasize that the core of these acts is the body, which is physically subjugated, also known as torture of the flesh.

Nevertheless, with the idealization of the panopticon illustrated in the manual on screen (FOUCAULT, 1999c), for the supervision of inmates, whose central idea is the creation of a circular or ring-shaped space, with a central observation tower that allows the visualization of all the cells or individual spaces around, in which the cells are arranged so that they are visible to the tower, but not to the other individuals in the other cells. Thus, each individual is led to believe that they are always being watched, even though in reality this is not the case all the time. In other words, this architectural structure creates a powerful psychological effect on individuals, leading them to internalize surveillance and adopt self-regulating behaviours, as instructed by Bentham:

It is a machine prison with a cell of visibility where the inmate will be trapped as in the Greek philosopher's glass house and a central point from where a permanent gaze can control both the prisoners and the staff. Around these requirements, many variations are possible, the Benthamian Panopticon in its strict form, or in a semicircle, or in the shape of a cross, or the star arrangement (FOUCAULT, 1999c, p. 209).

Corroborating this understanding, the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century saw the end of the torture of the body. In other words, the punishment of the body as an attraction ceased to be used, i.e. the submission of bodies to physical torture, such as flogging, amputations and public executions, amputations and public executions, which, in addition to having a punitive character, also had a deterrent effect on society, as it served as crime prevention, according to Foucault, was gradually replaced by more "humane" and disciplinary methods of punishment, and the disciplinization of bodies began to be adopted.

In this sense, so says Foucault:

A process for dividing up individuals, fixing and distributing them spatially, classifying them, taking from them the maximum of time, and the maximum of strength, training their bodies, codifying their continuous behavior, keeping them in a visibility without gaps (FOUCAULT, 1999c, p.195).

It is also possible to see in this reasoning that this form of power is carried out by a part of the state, and that it is "necessary for it to have an instrument of control for permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making everything visible, yet the state's real intention is social control" (FOUCAULT, 1987, p. 159).

Furthermore, through the docilization of bodies, disciplined individuals are created, adapted to social demands, productive and obedient. Disciplinary power is exercised through the normalization of bodies, establishing ideal standards of appearance, behaviour and health, and punishing or excluding those who do not conform to these norms.

In this way, the docilization of bodies is closely linked to the notion of biopower, which refers to the process by which individuals are subjected to practices of discipline and training in order to make them useful and docile, regulating and controlling behaviour, sexual practices, health, reproduction and other aspects of life, with the aim of creating subjects who are productive and submissive to power.

Therefore, the influence of biopolitics and biopower becomes evident, as determining mechanisms in the control of bodies in the most diverse areas of the population, embodied in what Foucault says:

The rapid development, in the course of the classical era, of various disciplines - schools, colleges, barracks, workshops; the emergence, also, in the field of political practices and economic observations, of the problems of birth, longevity, public health, housing and migration; an explosion, therefore, of various and numerous techniques to achieve the subjection of bodies and the control of populations. This ushers in the era of "biopower" and "biopolitics" (FOUCAULT, 2012, p. 131).

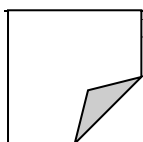
In the light of the above teachings, it is possible to see how the control of bodies is exercised through biopowers through multiple institutions, in order to discipline the population according to the form and need of government, thus using controls over bodies aimed at impacting on health, sexuality, the economy, and finally, with the advent of capitalism, its reflexes in keeping the population docile and useful.

### **III. Final Considerations**

Ex positis, we can broadly summarize biopolitics as the state's control over life, over bodies, bio (life) politics, in other words, the politics of life. On the other hand, bio (life) power, i.e. power over life/bodies, is the impact of this form of government on people's lives, on the population.

In this sense, examining biopolitics in the pre-capitalist context (before the industrial revolution), a period in which despotic government predominated, the absolutist king, unfortunately, had full control over the population, in this reasoning, according to Foucault, the King could "make live or let die", that is, the king could allow the subject to live, or rather, the king simply did not perform any act, or he could promote his death, that is, the king would make the subject die. In other words, at the time, biopower was being used by these absolutist kings in these senses.

However, in the post-industrial revolution period, we can see a change in the dynamics of these biopowers, with the fall of the monarchy and the beginning of capitalism.



In this sense, a new state conjecture begins, with different demands from those previously used, that is, in this diapason, the "make live or let die" is used, that is, the state begins to have a concern with the life of the population, given that the population is now noticed as a soul that works, that makes the circulation of capital turn, in this prism, the state begins to promote policies aimed at promoting life.

Furthermore, analyzing how biopower was practiced in the pre-capitalist period, we can see that it was based on self-care, taking care of oneself, before biopolitics became effective in the population, that is, it was necessary to take care of one's self, one's health, in order to later provide governance for the population.

Continuing in this vein, it is also feasible to admit the role of Christian morality in polishing the behavior of the masses, or rather, in this context, the denial of people's will becomes evident, to the detriment of a greater good, which, in this case, is salvation. In other words, this omnipotent and omnipresent power has the ability to control the most diverse actions of the masses, while individuals feel constrained in practicing certain behaviors that are not within the paradigms of those who fit into the life of a Christian, because they feel watched on a daily basis.

In other words, this idea of the panopticon reveals how power operates efficiently over people's lives, because even without the constant presence of watchmen, individuals self-regulate and internalize self-discipline, given the idea that they are being monitored around the clock.

In this way, we can see how biopolitics, through biopowers, or rather forms of control over bodies, manifests itself in the most diverse areas of everyday life, namely: its implications for health, sexuality, the economy, and finally its reflexes with the advent of capitalism (docilization of bodies, with the aim of disciplining subordinate and productive people), in other words, how these mechanisms of control over bodies have repercussions on the lives of the population and consequently on the form of governance.

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